

# Elena Damiani, Amalia Pica: Future Light: Escaping Transparency

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Artists: Pablo Accinelli, Doug Ashford, Claire Barclay, Rana Begum, [Elena Damiani](#), Shezad Dawood, Annika Eriksson, Matias Faldbakken, Monir Shahroudy Farmanfarmaian, Ane Hjort Guttu, Tom Holert, Philippe Parreno, [Amalia Pica](#), Bik Van der Pol, Yelena Popova, Walid Raad, Haegue Yang.

## [\*Future Light: Escaping Transparency\*](#)

Curated by Maria Lind

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How come some features of the old Enlightenment have crept back and are now being revisited in art, activism, and theory? Why now, after just about a century problematizing, questioning and opposing its legacy?

Perhaps it is an ever more economized, fragmented, privatized, and surveilled existence where, for instance, taxpayers are forced to compensate for the crimes of financial speculation and the gap between the rich and the poor is rapidly increasing. It now becomes enticing to return to some fundamental notions and phenomena inherited from the struggle for universal emancipation: the light of reason and rationality, the individual subject, and the public sphere. They point to a wish to explore vision from its very basics—as if to try to see anew, to radical transformations of desire and to challenges to ownership and property relations as we know them. And to do so while not losing sight of the future, in the midst of parallax views, in light of the hyper-contradictions of our time. A future beyond pre-emptive and algorithmic forecasting. Art has after all this capacity to function as part seismograph and part sniffer dog, detecting things not yet seen, gelled and shaped in other parts of society, creating new imaginaries. Whether utopian or dystopian, or an unclear mix of the two.

These basic notions in radically mutated forms seem to indicate a future affected by an emerging movement toward a new enlightenment, conscious of the violent heritage of the old one in whose name atrocities have been committed over the centuries. It is post-enlightenment, not as in “radical rupture” but as in “working through” some of its characteristics. This time it is acknowledging the tensions and contradictions of the enlightenment baggage, trying not to give up on the future while being embedded in the current condition of “retrotopia” where the past in general and “memorialism” in particular loom large. Thus, three strands of thought and action have crystallized within the framework of *Future Light*: non-penetrating light, the individual subject as reworked by the politics of queer-feminism and its polymorph desires, and the public sphere reconceived through and as commons and commoning. Each strand is taking shape in a different institutional and spatial setting, accompanied by a reader entitled *Future Light* and the mini-symposium *Politics of Shine*, and partly prepared in a closed

workshop in October 2013 as well as in a series of public MAK Nite Labs at the MAK.

Within contemporary art, instead of the penetrating light that gives clarity and transparency, there is the reflected and refracted light that creates opacity, abstraction, and shadows. It is the light that goes on and off, that does not serve as a searchlight and yet is able to nurture new beginnings. Besides conditioning human visual perception, its new forms—for example the low-power LED light—are having other literal effects on the look and taste of plants as well as the physical and medical conditions of humans and animals. Furthermore, the future remains a point of orientation in many of the artworks. All this is being played out in the group exhibition at the MAK. Existing paintings, videos, sculptures, and drawings by seventeen artists is making up an installation without walls but with plenty of natural light.

Theory and practice in the name of LGBT and queerness have for some time reshaped notions of the individual, subjectivity, and desire. If traditional notions of gender rely on heteronormative patriarchal formations of desire, then this linchpin is now being challenged in ways hitherto unseen, affected by synthetic extensions of identity such as hormonal drugs. Under the rubric of *LOVING, REPEATING*, Pauline Boudry and Renate Lorenz are presenting three film-based works at Kunsthalle Wien. The installations convey filmed performances where the tensions between the individual and the collective carry a high degree of theatricality. While curtains and fumes create opacity, glitter and wigs indicate glamour. The characters who feature in these dramas are consciously multi-sided, defying normality, including the law and economy. Neither being entirely historical nor present, they project ahead in a truly anachronistic manner, to new and unrealized forms of enjoyment. Today many artistic and other projects revive the notions of “commons” and “commoning” in response to failures of capitalism and the increasing withdrawal of the welfare state. How will the Vienna

Biennale of 2049 resurrect the voices of the citizens' initiatives that have appeared during the past 130 years? With *The Report*, STEALTH.unlimited and Stefan Gruber together with Paul Currion shed light on how the achievements of these initiatives have been essential to the development of the city, yet have often been obscured by the political requirements of Vienna's urban ambitions. Straddling the line between fiction and non-fiction, *The Report* will ask what it means to be a citizen of the smartest of all smart cities. It will be released as a limited printed edition in September 2049.

In a new film Marysia Lewandowska is exploring the commons as experienced through the kindergarten as an early testing ground for sharing, belonging, privacy and withdrawal. The project was triggered by the work and life of the Viennese architect Margarete Schütte-Lihotzky (1897–2000), in which many of the contradictions of the 20th century are played out, and involves the voice of Di Zhang, a young architect in Beijing for whom "the communism of commerce" is a lodestar. Ayreen Anastas and Rene Gabri are arranging an "unworkshop" around the politics of food and food production, which have been central concerns for the artists in their work on commons and commoning. The design, research and art studio Metahaven, who have developed the notion of "black transparency", have co-conceptualized and designed the e-reader *Future Light* and the handout which connects the various parts of the overall project *Future Light*.